



Officials: Grant will help downtown Utica businesses

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UTICA — A half-million dollar state grant will be directed toward a group of downtown business owners on Bleeker and Genesee streets, officials announced at a news conference Thursday.

The Main Street grant program allows rehabilitation and renovation projects, mostly for existing buildings, officials said. Businesses in the 100 block of Genesee Street and 100 and 200 blocks of Bleeker Street will be able to apply, with awards being announced in May.

“We’re going to take the best projects; the ones that are going to revitalize the area,” city Mayor David Roefaro said.

The city’s Main Street grant application was once left for dead as the city missed the application deadline after the Common Council voted too late to approve it.

The program itself was also in danger, and Roefaro said he lobbied in Albany to continue the program and to revive the city’s application.

The grant requires matching funds, which will be made up for with \$250,000 in federal Community Development Block Grant money administered through the city, and funds from businesses that get the grants.

The city will be administering the grant along with Rebuild Mohawk Valley, a subsidiary of the Mohawk Valley Housing Authority. Rebuild Mohawk Valley plans to build about 170 mixed-income loft apartments, aimed particularly at Utica School of Commerce students.

A series of eligible businesses attended the news conference, and several said building improvements would be a welcome addition to the area.

“I think it will help everyone,” said Marc DelBuono, owner of That Place bar, who said he could use the money to spruce up the façade of his art deco building.

George Heath and Wade McCrite said the money would help their projects. Heath recently opened a bar called Strut at 243-245 Bleeker St. and would like to develop the upper floors, while McCrite is turning 237-239 Bleeker St. into retail space on the bottom floor with a martini bar on an upper floor.

“Who wants to invest, without help, a half-million dollars into a property worth \$150,000?” Heath said. “It makes the project more feasible.”

A public meeting is being held Thursday at City Hall to educate the building owners on the process.

Housing Authority Director of Grants and Programs John Furman said the loft apartments will be dispersed throughout the area, rather than one particular place. He said housing authority staff will also help consult on the grant projects.

“This project will really lay the foundation for the renaissance,” he said. “It will be a new, vibrant, in vogue neighborhood with a variety of incomes.”

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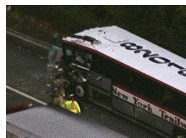
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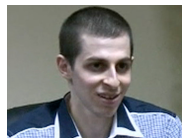
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